



# The Development and Management of Security Risks along the Western Balkans Migration Route

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## Abstract

The Western Balkan Migration Route, stretching between the Middle East and the southeastern region of the European Union, has long been a source of political and cultural strife, most recently due to its prevalence during the 2015 Migration Crisis several years earlier. The chaotic movement of refugees and asylum seekers created an environment for security risks to develop along the route, with three in particular seeing a rise in prevalence: human smuggling, trafficking of illegal goods, and the movement of dangerous individuals into the EU. This paper looks into, via separate case studies, the history and development of each security risk within the Western Balkans while also analyzing each risk before and after the recent migration crisis. The paper also observes how the Balkan Countries and EU member states have taken steps to address said security risks, the successes, failures, and complications particularly during the migration crisis. One area of significance will be the lack of cohesive action within the EU institutions, which saw conflicting political ideologies, member states dealing with the flow of migrants, and also local issues within the Balkan Countries preventing decisive action. Finally, the paper concludes with the result that these security risks have seen a decrease in prevalence along the Western Balkans Route since 2015, particularly following the EU-Turkey migration deal closing passage along the route for migrants in 2016. However, it is noted that improved coherent action by local and international actors is key to further decrease these risks in the foreseeable future.

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## Introduction

Migration has always played a prominent role in the development of European history and culture, from the emigrants whom left the continent for the new world between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, to the waves of refugees whom fled to escape the social and economic hardships of two world wars and multiple civil conflicts during the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Lehmann 2015). Recently, however, a rise in religious and racial persecution within the Middle East along with multiple conflicts have caused many to flee to the safety of the European continent (Lehmann 2015). By 2015, this had developed into a migration crisis, with multiple European countries struggling to lawfully and ethically handle the thousands attempting to move across the borders seeking safety or better opportunities, whether such movement was legal or not.

Though this large movement of refugees took place primarily on routes both through Mediterranean countries as well as through the Western Balkans, the latter will be the focus of this discussion. The primary Balkan route began in the Former Yugoslavia Republic of Macedonia, then through Serbia, and finally through to Hungary and the European Union (Mandić 2017). However, Hungary's policy to close its border to Serbia changed the path through Croatia and Slovenia in order to reach more northern European countries such as Germany (Mandić 2017). Both courses for the Western Balkan route have seen an increasing number of migrants crossing between 2015 and 2017, with as many as 764,000 migrants crossing in 2015 alone (Murray, Tubakovic 2016). In addition to the large number of migrants in the area, the lack of coherent and effective policy by both Balkan countries and the European Union resulted in overcrowding of relocation camps and closed pathways for entry across borders; as of July 2017, as many as 70,000 migrants were being held in Greece and Serbia alone (Tisdall 2017).

The main issue presented by the large influx of migrants and a lack in adequate policy is the rapid increase in security risks within this Western Balkan route, which threaten the safety of migrants and national citizens alike. Although there are quite a few that are significant, the three I will be focusing on are those that I feel are most severe to the security of the Balkans and of the European Union overall: the business of illegal smuggling of refugees across borders, the movement of illegal goods (such as firearms and narcotics), and the crossing of dangerous and potential terror-affiliated individuals along the route into the European Union (Frontex 2017). As

the migration crisis continues, and even despite the decrease in migrants coming across the Western Balkan Route since the crisis began in 2015, the lack of a clear and coherent policy amongst member states, at the institutional level, and amongst the Balkan countries have allowed for such security risks to continue unattended. One reason for this can be due to clashes in political ideology within EU institutions, particularly following the rise in right-wing populism. Another reason for this lack of policy is due to the unbalanced burden of migrant flows between member states, such as the difference in migrants coming into Mediterranean countries like Greece and Italy versus northern EU countries like Germany and France. Finally, one other reason for the lack of action is due to the lacking frameworks within the Balkan Countries in question (Tisdall 2017).

This then leads to the topic of discussion within this paper: how have local and international actors taken action against the previously-mentioned security risks since the migration crisis began in 2015, and what can be done to further address them in the future? Through the case studies on the security risks, as well as details on why a cohesive policy has not been developed, I will argue that said security risks have seen a decrease in prevalence in the region since 2015, but they are still present and pose a threat to security within the Balkans and for the European Union overall. In addition, I argue that better attempts to create clear and effective policy between local and international groups must be taken by in order to properly address the security risks listed within this paper.

## Literature Review

According to the archives of the European Western Balkans group, the Western Balkan route first became popular as a route for migration back in 2012, following the European Union lifting Schengen visa restrictions for five of the Balkan countries: Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia (European Western Balkans 2017); the actual process of the visa restrictions being lifted took place between 2009-2010 (European Commission 2017). In 2012, we see that Syrian and Somali migrants began to use this route to travel up to Hungary in order to request asylum (and were also joined by Kosovo migrants looking for economic opportunities within northern Europe) (European

Western Balkans 2017). This information is important to know as it explains how the route became accessible as a legal means of migration towards European Union member states as well as showing what allowed for the large numbers of migrants using this specific route in 2015. It is also worth noting that this was done as a means for easier access by the Balkans into member states and also served as a means to ease the transition for the Balkan countries into qualifying for membership status into the European Union (given their position as potential candidate countries).

Louise Shelly determines that human smuggling and trafficking are two of the largest-growing criminal enterprises (prevalent since the 1980's) to emerge within Eastern Europe due to the large influx of international migrants seeking economic opportunities as well as displaced populations fleeing war and persecution in areas such as the Middle East (Shelly 2014). Based on her report, criminal organizations, including those operating out of Turkey (which has served as an entryway for the Western Balkan Route) were largely active in the business of smuggling migrants, and estimated that by 2010, they had grossing roughly \$3 billion annually from the region through human smuggling (Shelly 2014). Based on this assessment by Shelly, the issue of human smuggling in the region has been present for decades before the crisis, but the large influx of refugees arriving and seeking passage since 2015 creates easy prey for both independent smugglers and criminal networks. This shows that it's an issue that has not been addressed by the European Union even before the migration crisis began, and is all the more reason for a more coherent policy to be taken to address these issues for the sake of national citizens and migrants alike.

In Bodo Weber's article "The EU-Turkey Refugee Deal and the Not Quite Closed Balkan Route," the 2016 piece of legislation is discussed in terms of its intended effects on the issue of migration as well as the resulting consequences of such measures (Weber 2017, 1). The unofficial Balkan route was closed around the time the EU-Turkey Deal was agreed to in March of 2016, where Turkey was expected to take more initiative in preventing migrants from illegally crossing its borders into the EU either via the Mediterranean or the Balkans (Weber 2017, 11). But according to Weber the deal's implementation and the route closure led to three outcomes: the number of migrants and refugees dropping along the route but tens of thousands still gaining access across, the route redirecting from the Greek Islands as an entry point to Bulgaria's land border with Turkey, and the use of smuggling increasing as the main form of transit into the

European Union (Weber 2017, 3). The measures taken by member states like Bulgaria, Croatia, and Hungary to restrict migration into and through their borders by imposing national policies to restrict have amounted to systemic violence, systematic violations of national and EU-level laws and conventions regarding human rights and values, and have also demonstrated a departure from core EU ideals essential for membership within the Union (Weber 2017 5). In addition, Balkan countries like Serbia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) wishing to seek membership into the EU are caught along this route with national EU member state policies restricting movement have bottlenecked up to ten thousand migrants within the region alone and leading to national issues on top of already-urgent matters of national security and fulfilling criteria for EU membership according to the Copenhagen Criteria (Weber 2017, 7). Finally, Weber mentions how the resulting fallout from the deal demonstrate the European Union Institutions favoring outsourcing responsibility to outside actors and caving to a “lowest denominator” approach threatening rule of law and democracy within member states and Balkan Counties, again due to the illegal pushbacks and restrictive national policies denying international protection (Weber 2017, 4). Another issue raised by this is the disunity and discouragement of pro-European political factions and give rise to Eurosceptic ideals within the region (Weber 2017, 4). I believe these facts are important as it helps highlight the point made by the paper, in that security risks are not being properly addressed by the member states nor by Balkan countries and thus the result is a disunity leading to these risks remaining and continuing to pose challenges to European unity and expansion. In addition, it shows that a short-term approach to hand out responsibility to other actors has been a focus as of late, but in my proposals for these problems I will argue that more long-term collaboration that doesn't simply involve giving other actors the job of restricting movement is not enough and that policy action from the top-down via the institutions and national actors will be key to reducing the security risks even further.

The joint article written by Senada Šelo Šabić and Sonja Borić, “At the Gate of Europe: A Report on Refugees on the Western Balkan Route,” discusses the impact of the migrant crisis on the Western Balkans Region by detailing each individual Balkan country and assess how they were impacted as well as what measures they took between 2015 and 2016 (Borić & Šabić 2016, 2). Such parameters of analysis used include general information, legislative framework, a timeline of events, process of registration and accommodations for asylum seekers, and impact

on civil society (including political discourse and media influence (Borić & Šabić 2016, 8). The article points out that each country within the Balkans was impacted differently and individually, but observing one another as transit points along a common migration route helped form a sense of mutual understanding amongst the Balkan countries (Borić & Šabić 2016, 16). However, EU member states like Austria and Hungary taking initiative to close their borders in late 2015 stood to create choke points within several Balkan countries, including Serbia and FYROM, which then exacerbated fears of cooperation and trust present since the Yugoslav wars in the 1990's while along with complicating the process of economic and democratic development (Borić & Šabić 2016, 17). Finally, a point is made by Borić and Šabić that the EU-Turkey deal made in 2016 actually helped temporarily quell the neighborly frictions made between the Balkan countries via the closing of the Balkans migration route (Borić & Šabić 2016, 18). I find this to be particularly interesting as previous articles have mentioned how the deal itself led to more smuggling usage and issues of Hungary's humanitarian record, but perhaps keeping the unofficial route closed is a step to be made and can also stand as progress towards a common migration policy for the Balkan countries. However, the lack of EU member states finding common ground on developing effective policies that help long-term protection of asylum seekers and instead seek to deflect responsibility and emphasize stability can also be an issue should an improved solution is not found soon. Thus, my point made is that the deal itself was not beneficial to the Balkans but rather the closing of the route, but neither do not improve the issues of smuggling nor the problems of movement of illegal goods or dangerous individuals into the European Union.

The research article "Shining a Light on the Western Balkans: Internal Vulnerabilities and Malign Influence from Russia, Terrorism, and Transnational Organized Crime" by Vera Zakem, Bill Rosenau, and Danielle Johnson discusses the internal vulnerabilities and instability of the region resulting from the 1990's period of civil wars and nationalist dissent and how several factors have created its status as a "geopolitical competition for influence between the West and various adversary actors" (Johnson, Rosenau & Zakem 2017, 3), such as the flow of foreign fighters and extremism along with criminal organizations using the region for a region of transporting weapons and contraband (Johnson, Rosenau & Zakem 2017, 3). The findings made by the article suggests that due to the lack of stability within institutions as well as increase in local corruption and poor border management and security, criminal groups are increasingly able

to ship harmful goods such as guns and drugs through the region and towards global destinations such as Western Europe (Johnson, Rosenau & Zakem 2017, 4). In addition, disenfranchised minority groups within the region are more influenced by terror organizations from the Middle East and Gulf States and allow for a greater risk for foreign fighters to emerge from the region or pass through the region into Western European countries and thus commit acts of terror (Johnson, Rosenau & Zakem 2017, 4). This, I feel is an important point to make as it shows the illegal smuggling of migrants within the region is not the only significant risk of security, and that the instability allowing for migrants to smuggle asylum-seekers also allows for outside groups to take advantage and push their own agenda and, as a result, lead to greater risk of harm or even loss of life to local and international citizens.

## Methodology

Based on the research performed on the topic and the background information presented, this paper will take an in-depth analysis at three of the main security risks present within the Balkan countries along the Western Balkan route, which include the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, and Hungary; additionally, it will focus on the on the years 2015-2017. The three security risks identified as being most impactful on the region in question are human trafficking of refugees, smuggling of illegal goods (such as firearms and drugs), and movement of terror-affiliated individuals. For each of the security risks chosen, there will be a case study procedure taken with discussing their background, the setup and development within the region, as well as their significance as a threat to the European Union and Balkan countries. It should also be kept in mind that the majority of focus will be on the period of the migration crisis from 2015-2016 and also the period 2016 and onwards following the EU-Turkey deal and the closing of the Balkans migration route. Once each security risk has been discussed, I will next analyze how the region has dealt with said major security risks, such as in policy or legislative action, and how successful they were at reducing the threat of the risks as a result. Finally, based on this analysis, I will attempt to formulate and propose a type of policy that would be most effective in handling the security risks currently present within



the region at both the national and supranational level and the possibility of it being implemented by the actors within the region.

## Case Study #1: Human Smuggling

One of the more immediate issues facing Balkan countries along the unofficial migration route during the migration crisis was the rampant usage of smugglers to bypass border security to enter into the European Union (REACH 2016). By the beginning of the crisis, in 2015, smugglers and their networks would usually comprise a wide spectrum of forms of operations, from a small group of poor European workers looking for quick cash to large networks of skilled operators which spanned connections with public facilities for meetups between migrants and the smugglers, such as within hotels, bars, bus depots, or sometimes rural areas. Within these networks, migrants would need to rely on a series of “transit points” between countries or certain regions, with smuggler contacts linking with cross-border connections, bribed authorities, and weaknesses in border systems in order to reach the next leg of the journey (REACH, 2016). Typically, migrants would originate from the Middle East trying to flee regional chaos, such as within Syria or Iraq, with the goal of reaching northwestern European countries such as Germany and France due to their more attractive economic policies as well as seeing them as offering better opportunities for work or for improved living conditions (Shelly 2014, 6-7).

In order to attract migrants, smuggling networks would spread word via posting advertisements in local newspapers and word of mouth while also arranging a variety of transportation options to move numbers of refugees at a time; such options include large trucks to dozens of migrants at a time, taxi cabs bought out and refitted to hold migrants, small ships and boats to travel across the Mediterranean from Turkey to either Greece or Bulgaria to get towards the Western Balkan route (Mandić 2017). In addition, the large networks of groups would create certain areas and checkpoints along the journey to accommodate migrants along the way and ensure their passage (Mandić 2017). However, as local governments began to crackdown on smuggling paths through national legislation, migrants would have to endure more dangerous smuggling options: routes that would have lasted several weeks would be condensed to a few days, smugglers began to send migrants without assistance on dangerous routes (for

example, ships without captains), and an increased cost to services with higher potential for injury or even death (Mandić 2017).

The issue of smuggling not only poses a security risk for member of the Balkans and the EU member states, but also a risk for the abuse of human rights of asylum seekers and migrants using such a practice in order to obtain the chance for a better life or for safety (Human Rights Watch 2015). The ongoing civil war within Syria as well as the rise of ISIL and additional terror groups within the Middle East has forced many to flee their home countries to neighboring countries for safety, as many as ten million from Syria since the war's start in 2011 (Lovieno 2017, 2). The large number of asylum seekers and refugees seeking protection westward have prompted a number of European countries to enact restrictive measures to limit or restrict migration all together (Lovieno 2017, 4). A lack of legal means to enter into the European Union as well as inadequate and unbalanced legislation within the European Union has prompted more refugees to utilize illegal smuggling operations as a way to find safety despite the legal and monetary costs (Humans Rights Watch 2015). But following the closure of the Western Balkans route as a legal means of migration following the EU-Turkey deal in 2016, smuggling continues to exist within a more dangerous means of execution. Including the condensed time for crossings and increased cost for services, some smugglers connected through criminal organizations will also push refugees into trafficking or sex trade as a means of income, sometimes even as an additional form of payment if migrants can't afford the standard price (Human rights Watch 2015).

In addition to the increased risk to migrants traveling via illegal means, smuggling networks would be known to have prior or current ties to other forms of criminal activity: in 2015 over 220 smugglers were identified by Europol with 22% having ties to drug smuggling, 20% to human trafficking, and 20% to property crime (Europol-INTERPOL 2016). Groups like these would be linked towards criminal groups operating within the migrants' home country (which in turn communicate with smuggling networks within the Balkans) and victimize migrants making the journey through large costs of travel (usually between 2000-8000 euros) and the risk of being sold into sex trafficking or forced labor as a means of payment (Europol-INTERPOL 2016). One of the more infamous cases of unsafe smuggling methods was in 2015 when four smugglers, three Bulgarians and one Afghan, were arrested after a van in Austria,

which they had operated, was found with 71 dead migrants locked in the back after suffocating within the sealed environment (Harding 2015).

In efforts to fight against human smuggling, and by extension uncontrolled migration, several southern and eastern EU member state actors took national stances via the building of fences and border walls while restricting all migration in through their countries, such as Hungary and Austria (Weber 2017, 7). In contrast, more northern EU member states like Germany and France took on more pro-migration initiatives, with the former even suspending the Dublin III Regulations, requiring asylum seekers to register in the first EU member state they set foot in, to attract more Syrian refugees to journey north for better opportunities (Sardelic 2017). The EU-Turkey Refugee deal was a prominent development in closing the unofficial route as well as giving Turkey more responsibility to prevent asylum seekers from entering into the Union, but the immediate issue was the number of refugees already within Balkan countries along the route with either no legal means of entry or stuck in increasingly-crowded reception centers lacking of food or basic amenities for long periods of time (Sardelic 2017). This was also a method taken advantage of by smugglers, by waiting outside reception centers to offer migrants a better means of entry without waiting long periods of time, and even increased prices or dangerous routes were acceptable for refugees desperate enough for a better life (Weber 2017, 8).

## Case Study #2: Illegal Goods

As discussed earlier, the lack of strong institutions and rule of law in the wake of the Yugoslav wars in the 90's allowed for corruption and crime to take a stronger hold within the Balkan countries (Arapi 2017). However, the flow of goods and weapons through the region has been present for centuries: even as far back as the Ottoman and Austrian empires it served as a “buffer zone” between the competitive eastern and western powers due to its geographic positioning (Johnson, Rosenau & Zakem 2017, 28). In addition, the lack of trust between citizens and the state, even more amplified via the Balkan wars, creates a haven for criminal enterprises to flourish within the region, thus giving rise to the illegal trade of harmful goods within the region (Johnson, Rosenau & Zakem 2017, 29).

One major security risk which developed from the prevalence in organized crime was in the form of illegal firearms (Johnson, Rosenau & Zakem 2017, 2). Following the conflicts, many displaced communities and nationalist groups managed to hold onto the weapons they used during the fighting, and in some cases, had managed to raid undefended armories or depots (Arapi 2017). It wasn't long until criminal groups expanded business into the illegal firearms trade, and thus began entering stockpiles of weapons into the European black market (Arapi 2017). Since then, independent sellers and these larger criminal networks started their own operations selling firearms nationally within the Balkans and abroad into Western European countries and beyond, from smaller handguns and pistols to automatic and military-grade rifles. For example, on the European black market a standard AK-47 can cost between 500-2000 euros, depending on the country (Arapi 2017). In fact, according to United Nation reports, it was estimated that over 2 million individuals possessed 450,000 small arms in Kosovo, 750,000 illegal firearms in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and between 200,000-900,000 illegal firearms in Serbia (Arapi 2017).

One other illegal criminal trade that is of great concern to the European Union is the movement of illegal substances through the Balkans region. However, only a small number of communities within the Balkans produce and sell drugs locally and primarily the region serves as transit for internationally-grown substances which includes home-grown cannabis, synthetic drugs, and heroin (Anastasijavic 2006). One of the more prevalent illegal substances within the Balkans is heroin originating from Afghanistan, as roughly 90% of heroin present on the European black market originates from here, which criminal organizations transport between the Middle East and Central Asia into Western Europe (Anastasijavic 2006). In addition, as of 2016 other substances such as high-quality marijuana and cocaine are prevalent within the region, with Balkan countries such as Serbia and Bosnia serving as key transit points for drug smuggling, usually with the assistance of paid-off police officials (Tomovic 2016).

In order to control the movement of dangerous goods crossing through the region, the European Union and local actors within the Balkans have taken more aggressive strides in decreasing criminal activity in the region. For example, in 2017, Europol conducted Operation Calibre, an international collaboration with up to ten EU member states and Frontex that saw the seizing of over 135 firearms, 7000 rounds of ammunition and 18 arrests over several months within the Western Balkan region (Europol 2017). With tackling the trade of illegal substances,

some Balkan countries such as Albania have taken more assertive strides, where between 2014-2015 local police conducted a series of raids and managed to crack down and seize large numbers of smuggler networks and illegal drugs (Tomovic 2016).

### Case Study #3: Movement of Foreign Fighters and Terrorists

A third security risk identified for the Western Balkan Region has been the spread of violent extremism within the region following the Yugoslav conflicts as well as crossings by radicalized individuals from the Middle East into Western Europe (Johnson, Rosenau & Zakem 2017, 21). During the Yugoslav wars, the attacks and ethnic cleansing campaigns committed against Bosnian Muslims by Bosnian Serbs created outrage within the global Muslim community, thus leading to a rise in right-wing radical Islamic ideology (Andjelkovic, Lazic, and Vukovic 2016, 47). This was also seen in the rise of Mujahedeen (or holy warriors) within the Balkans, roughly 4000 during the early 90's, which took extreme forms of fighting against Bosnian Serbs for retaliation while adhering to a stricter form of Islamic doctrine (Johnson, Rosenau & Zakem 2017, 22). In addition, younger members of Balkan communities whom are ill content with economic conditions within the region are easily swayed via online radicalization and thus become a part of increasing extremist networks operating within and outside the region (Johnson, Rosenau & Zakem 2017, 24). Notwithstanding the extremist Islamic groups within the region, a number of other faith or ideological-driven groups have emerged: for example, an amalgamation of nationalism, clerico-facism, and Serbian Orthodox networks have developed over the decades following the Yugoslav wars have created extremist ideology to flourish whilst promoting violence against Jewish and Croats within the region (Johnson, Rosenau & Zakem 2017, 23).

In addition to these radicalized networks within the region of the Balkans, there is also the threat of foreign fighters using the area for passage to and from the Middle East or into Western Europe. In terms of entry into the Middle East, analysts have shown that as many as 1,000 locals have traveled to Syria or Iraq between 2012 and 2016 in order to train and serve ISIL, which is a number five times larger than those entering from Western Europe (Johnson, Rosenau & Zakem 2017, 25). It was also estimated that the largest number came from Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Albania in terms of those serving as foreign terrorist fighters (FTF)

(Andjelkovic, Lazic, and Vukovic 2016, 48). But another issue with a high number of FTFs in the region is the creation of recruitment or radicalization cells within the Balkans in order to help spread extremism to the population and help facilitate FTFs into Western Europe (Johnson, Rosenau & Zakem 2017, 25). In linking back to the previous two case studies, these groups will take advantage of weak border security and pass into Western European countries in order to carry out attacks for ISIL. One example of this was how two of the FTFs who engaged in the November 2015 Paris terrorist attack traveled from Syria and through Macedonia into France (Johnson, Rosenau & Zakem 2017, 26-27).

The rise in FTFs in the region have prompted the international community to push Balkan countries into greater control and criminalization of radicalization within the region. One method of this was in 2015 when all Western Balkan countries passed legislation to criminalize all foreign fighters and increased crackdowns on extremist networks operating within said countries (Johnson, Rosenau & Zakem 2017, 26). Since 2015, over 100 Balkan local citizens have been tried and prosecuted as foreign fighters attempting to reach the Middle East and join ISIL, but others have criticized the efforts and feel that countries need to focus on the prevention of radicalization rather than simply criminalize it (Johnson, Rosenau & Zakem 2017, 27). Additionally, critics note the presence of at least 3000 sleeper FTF within Bosnia and Herzegovina alone, according to the country's security agency, and argue that local police and military forces are ill-equipped or not coordinated enough to effectively break up these radical networks (Johnson, Rosenau & Zakem 2017, 28). One solution could be to open up further international aid via the creation of a joint-operational effort to help track FTFs and also to create social efforts to help rehabilitate or prevent locals from becoming radicalized or leaving for the Middle East or Western Europe for ISIL or the Islamist State (Andjelkovic, Lazic, and Vukovic 2016, 50).

## Analysis

Based on the previous case studies, a correlation between the security risks is that they were present within the Western Balkan countries along the unofficial migration route in some capacity up before the migration crisis began in 2015. There were periods of smaller and more

gradual waves of migration coming from the Middle East and North Africa into Western Europe decades before and after the Yugoslav conflicts and even centuries earlier. But at the same time, criminal organizations and foreign radical groups still capitalized on the geography and placement between the East and West, not just use by asylum seekers but also a path for the transport of illegal goods (Mandić 2017). As noted earlier, as the migration crisis increased in 2015 onwards, a multitude of responses came from EU member states attempting to find the best means to handle the flow of migrants from the Balkans as well as via the Mediterranean (Holehouse, Huggler, and Vogt 2015). From countries like Austria and Hungary erecting fences and borders to Germany allowing an “open the doors” initiative to let refugees in without legal challenges, Balkan and EU member states which were ill-prepared for a large number of migrants to process and manage (Holehouse, Huggler, and Vogt 2015). One of the consequences was the design of poorly-managed policies and reception centers built along the borders, lacking in supplies and taking years to fully process and in some cases; in many ways, it was nearly impossible for certain member states to fully uphold the Common European Asylum System (European Commission (A)) and ensure the rights and safety of migrants (Radu 2016). Such a chaotic environment creates a near-perfect storm for smugglers to take advantage of migrants seeking a fast way to travel, leading to increased risk of harm or being trafficked by criminal networks also taking advantage of irregular migration. In addition, the weak borders along the Balkans as well as due to corruption and ineffectiveness at the institutional level allowed for radical groups to send FTFs into Western Europe or into the Middle East to fight for the IS (Andjelkovic, Lazic, and Vukovic 2016, 52).

Overall it was the uncoordinated and inefficient response and coordination between supranational and local actors which led to the creation of unbalanced national initiatives, such as physical barriers and pushbacks violating EU rules of law and human rights, and heavier enforcement of supranational EU mandates, like the Dublin Regulation, to restrict overall migration, which would only increase the desperation of migrants and smugglers alike (Radu 2016). The need for a common response is what led to the EU-Turkey deal and ultimately the closing of the Western Balkan route as an unofficial route of migration, although to this day thousands of migrants still remain trapped in reception centers and eventually must be forced back to Turkey or other countries which cannot guarantee their safety from persecution or harm (Murray, Tubakovic 2017). In fact, based on the closing of the route three points stand out:

irregular migration along the Western Balkan route had decreased between 2016 and 2017, migration still continues through the region by bypassing Turkey into Bulgaria and along the path into Croatia and Slovenia, and smuggling networks are still used despite an increased risk of harm due to extra security within Balkan and EU countries (Weber 2017, 9-10).

An additional note of concern is the strikingly close relationship terrorist cells and radical groups have with criminal organizations within the Balkans in terms of common routes used in the region and the changing of hand with supplies and accessibility. For example, not only did the Paris attacks in 2015 occur by FTFs which traveled through the Balkan region, but both the January and November attacks were reported to have been committed with firearms that were part of illegal weapons trade originating from the former Yugoslav territories (Arapi 2017). Like human smuggling, the movement of illegal goods like firearms and substances, through regions within the former Yugoslavia destabilized by local conflicts, gave way to corruption due to an abundance of resources on hand, which have resulted in lucrative criminal business enterprises. Based on the usage of the Balkans to smuggle harmful goods and substances into the European Union, extremist networks can continue to take advantage of the ease of possessing munitions and routes through the Balkans into Western Europe; for the most part it's due to the unbalanced coordination and corruption within the Balkan countries which have allowed for such an environment to remain up to today (Arapi 2017).

In order to find a means of decreasing the harm of the previously-mentioned security risks, I propose that a new policy is needed, or even a series of policies operation at the national and supranational level. Such efforts would need to require collaboration between EU member states as well as by Balkan countries and would need to see immediate action and enforcement of standards already outlined within the EU treaties. First, it would effectively coordinate both internal (Interpol, Europol) and external (Frontex) groups to work with local security and defense agencies within the Balkans to help break up networks operating in smuggling, illegal goods, and extremism; this would be based on intelligence gathering and inter-departmental cooperation between local and supranational agencies within both regions. Second, it would have the European Union renegotiate current deals with outside parties such as Turkey and Libya while demanding their assurance that human rights will be upheld for migrants being held or taken to those countries at the current time. This could include the threats of sanctions or lack of support on local matters to ensure that standards are kept in place. Third, the Western Balkan route



would be kept open in a controlled and unofficial way while utilizing law enforcement and cross-border agencies to create a direct and controlled path for migrants to take. This would also require EU institutions to hold certain Balkan countries attempting to gain membership into the Union, and using the Copenhagen Criteria as a means to ensure that rule of law is upheld and increased so that the travel of migrants is kept safe. In addition, these improved institutions will help in coordinating and rounding up criminal networks and radical groups. Fourth, Balkan countries along the Western Balkans route will need to develop a greater number of reception centers and facilities with adequate supplies and proper networking to effectively process asylum seekers, with EU-appointed officials inspecting the camps regularly to ensure that they are sufficient; also, using NGO's and other outside groups as staff or regulation to help the process of processing move by quickly. For potential EU-member countries like those within the Balkans, they would be encouraged to follow similar guidelines and cooperate with law enforcement and EU-enforced actions to break up smuggling networks. In addition, Balkan countries should be reminded of their agreement to transition towards an EU-friendly system of governance and thus should take that seriously or risk losing potential membership status. EU member states which refuse to do so or continue to not develop proper means to hold migrants, the European Union should consider using Article Seven, which would suspend voting rights and inflict sanctions on a selected member state not enforcing EU-enforced fundamental rights, to persuade member states to comply with the rulings ("Article 7" 2017). With improved standards of rule of law and institutional operation, it would also be beneficial if more progress was made in the area of improving economic and social conditions so that there is a greater incentive to not delve into criminal or radical terrorist networks for locals and international citizens alike.

Finally, these revisions would need take place over a set period of time, preferably to see progress within the next five, especially in light of the upcoming time table put by the Commission earlier in February 2018 to have several Balkan countries become EU member states by 2025 (Bartunek 2018). This would require the European Union to take immediate action on developing proper policy and to assess the situation within both individual member states and potential member states. I believe such action is needed as communication will be key towards creating the right type of policies to not only ensures the best type of procedure to accommodate migrants but to also double down on criminal networks and extremist groups that threaten the fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed by the European Union.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it will be restated that the purpose of this paper was to investigate the main security risks facing the countries along the Western Balkan migration path during the migration crisis occurring between 2015-2017: human smuggling, illegal goods trafficking, and movement of extremist and terror-affiliated groups. The paper was also meant to detail how such risks have not been adequately handled as of the end of 2017, and implementing the proper type of policies to ensure rule of law and upholding of human rights within the Balkans and the European Union is key to seeing positive changes within the region. The information also shows that these security risks have been present decades and even centuries before the migration crisis, but the time of mass migration in the mid to late 2010's have caused these security risks to adapt and cultivate allowing for a greater flow of potential harm towards EU and Balkans citizens. This is why a new policy like the one previously proposed is necessary, as it demonstrates a need for immediate action and ensuring effective communication and cooperation is used amongst EU member states and create the best policy, or at the very least take better strides, towards handling the security risks still prevalent within the region of the Western Balkans.

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